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Chapter 1 by Ricky Advani

I could see it. It stood tall on the rocky granite hill and glimmered it's light over the horizon. The path was dangerous and filled with ravines, thank god there wasn't much of a gravity problem. Dust shot into the air as I hopped around like a frantic bunny. You could still see the sun gleaming it's rays over planet Lo. The rocks and hills were plain rock which exploited all 1024 shades of grey, in other words dull....

I finally reached a distance from which I could see the tower clearly, though there wasn't any path as there was a cliffside that forged a dead end. There wasn't much time left, I had to enter the tower before XY Canaris Majoris would rise from the other end and leave the surface open to 3500 degrees celsius of scorching heat.

I still had 6 hours left, there weren't any satellites, so I couldn't establish a connection to VA Headquarters. Then I saw an opening into the wall, it was small and sketchy but my only sign of survival. Better be crushed and die a quick death rather than suffer and burn in that heat.

Chapter 2 by Harlander



The next morning I got up and headed towards the tower. The sun was still up, though it was heading towards a sunset. The construction was almost finished, though there were still some parts missing.

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was beyond us. Even the translucent, glowing section at the top of the tower was apparently pristine,

We had no idea what could possibly have taken a chunk out of it. The crack was the only sign of damage on the entire structure - a slightly less than man-sized hole punched through the side, fortunately within reach of the ground.

The crack was ragged and irregular. As I drew close, the points of broken shards within glinted at me. Any one looked like it could shred my suit and the flesh beneath at a touch, but a chance of death inside was better than its certainty in the killing light of XY Canis Majoris.

I reached my hand up to the edge of the hole and slowly hauled myself inside.

Chapter 3 by Tim Starry



I sneaked through the shards, my suit intact. I pulled the hatch closed. A momentary pause to listen for leaks and to check my helmet display for alarms. Suit integrity good. No oxygen alarms.

Dark. I chin the helmet light. I know I'm low on battery but I need to see where I am. The spots reveal a tunnel going in two directions. The light only shows me a few meters in either direction. I'm just happy to be underground and away from that blistering sun. Which way to go? I mentally flip a coin.

The oxygen status shows yellow. I don't have much time. Any direction is as good as any other. I choose left.

Chapter 4 by Harlander



The tunnel's walls were smooth, once I'd passed the threshold of the jagged crack. The walls glistened, white and pearlescent in the light of my helmet lamp. Atmospheric readings show gradually increasing pressure as I shuffle onward, my suit boots squeaking on the surface. The tunnel curved gently, its sides occasionally punctuated by fist-sized circular openings that

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my training, and clamped down on the building anxiety. Ignore that skulking fear of suffocating alone an unimaginable distance from home.

Suddenly, the reflected light from my helmet lamp bloomed. Something was in front of me, blocking my path. Some kind of door, overlapping petal shapes of the same pearlescent material.

I reached out and touched one with my glove, and it twitched...

Chapter 5 by Ricky Advani



An aura of colours glowed through the petals and flowed into my glove. It had entered my suit! I could see the magenta aura cloud my visor until it looked like I had gone blind. The taste of the aura rested upon my taste buds and my vocal cords.

I soon began to fear and think for if I was dead. Suddenly the O2 indicator beeped and the screen read, *Oxygen levels neutral*

I reluctantly removed the helmet and cleared out the aura. What was this magic?

I felt much calmer, stronger and wiser. I then discovered a lever behind the podium and pulled it down.

The concrete roof above my head began to rise and opened up to space.

How can I still be alive with my body being exposed to total vacuum?

Chapter 7 by Windlion



I should be screaming, running, fleeing ... but I am not, because something is encouraging me to be calm, accepting. Not in words, but in some deeper sense.

The rational side of me connects the aura with this self-destructive behavior and screams that I should at least put my helmet back on -- but then notices that the walls have also fallen away
and I am standing now on an open platform bathed in the unbearable brightness of my辜

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and am breathing now

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High Score!

Words form in my mind, unbidden. *Peace. You are protected. You are welcome here.*

Chapter 8 by Windlion



Base headquarters called off the search for my body after a week. They notified my family, arranged a memorial service, provided support for them, and closed my file with a note "Lost on XY Canaris Majoris 3, presumed dead."

In a way, I was. The Tower's portal led to a galactic civilization millions of years older than our own.

They had long ago abandoned any connection to physical objects in favor of virtual avatars maintained on the inner surface of black holes, and had offered me the chance to join them.

It sounded amazing, to exist forever and be aware of everything in the universe! They were eager to try bringing one of our species into their virtual civilization, so I volunteered.

Sanity? Overrated.

Life? Just keeps getting stranger and more wonderful!

the end

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